

# Scythian Monks and their contribution to the clarification of the fourth century theology

Emanuel GAFIȚA\*

## Summary

Scythian monks play an important role in the Christological controversies of the late sixth century. Most doctrine disputes appear in the monastic world, the cultural hearth and of Christian spirituality. They preach the theological formula: ἓνα δῆς ἁγίας τριάδος πεπονθέναι σαρχὶ = *One in the Holy Trinity suffered in the flesh*. After much controversy, their expression will find triumph under Emperor Justinian the Great.

## Keywords

Scythian monks, Scythia, formula, disputes, decrees.

## 1.1. Formula of the Scythian Monks and Their Action

The historical-doctrinal situation of the Church after the Council of Chalcedon was extremely tense, burdened with many questions, disputes and schisms between the East and the West. The Christological divergences continued, and the Nestorian and Monophysite problem from the Eastern Churches could not be fully elucidated. In this situation, a new stage is opened in the confessional work of the Scythian monks in Rome, found best in the phrase of Metropolitan Irineu Popa: "*Christology of Chalcedon, after the Council of Chalcedon*".<sup>1</sup>

Scythian monks play an important role in the Christological controversies of the late sixth century. Most doctrine disputes appear in the monastic world, the cultural hearth and Christian spirituality. In the capital of the Empire there was a group of

---

\* Emanuel GAFIȚA is doctoral student at Orthodox Theological Faculty St. „Andrei Șaguna”, „Lucian Blaga” University, Sibiu, Romania. E-mail: gafitaemanuel90@yahoo.com

<sup>1</sup>†HG Prof. PhD. Irineu Ion Popa, *Iisus Hristos este Același, ieri și azi și în veac*, Publishing House of the Metropolitan of Oltenia, Craiova 2010, pp. 288-307.

akoimati monks<sup>2</sup> (Nestorian supporters), secretly supported from Rome, where they informed everything that was happening in Constantinople. Their inclination to Nestorian Diophysitism did not satisfy the group of those who tried in Constantinople to achieve a pacifist understanding, either by disregarding the Fourth Ecumenical Council<sup>3</sup>, or through a summary from diplophysite Chalcedonian theology and that of St. Cyril of Alexandria who still enjoyed great admiration among the Monophysites.

Under these circumstances of the empire, a group of monks originating from Scythia Minor arrive in the first months of 519 in the capital, bringing with them the theological formula: "ἓνα δῆς ἁγίας τριάδος πεπονθέναι σαρχί" = "*One in the Holy Trinity suffered in the flesh*". It was intended that this formula obtain the approval of the Church. The phrase is also found under another form at the Patriarch Proclu of Constantinople, who sends it to the Armenians against Theodore of Mopsuestia in 445<sup>4</sup>. Also, the formulation reminded, by appearance similarity, of the Theopaschitic addition to the Trisagion: „ὁ σταυροθεὶς δι' ἡμᾶς" of Patriarch Peter Gnafevs of Antioch or Fulo, who was considered a heretic<sup>5</sup>. By inserting the expression "*You, Who crucified Yourself for us*" into the Trisagion, the Holy Trinity or Divine Being is attributed the possibility of suffering<sup>6</sup>. Interpolation was meant to proclaim, using a formula from the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed, an essential conception of Cyrillian thinking: The Word, as unique "*subject*" in Christos is also the subject of death "*in body*", which is "*His*". Certainly the Trisagion was interpreted as a song to the incarnate Word, and its variant as interpolation was formally Orthodox. This would have been categorically heretical, if the hymn would have addressed the Holy Trinity, involving the suffering of the Three Persons or the Divine Being<sup>7</sup>. In many churches,

---

<sup>2</sup> ἄχοιμήδαι = neadormiți. Asupra lor L. Duchesne, o. c. 54-56 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, in *Revista Teologică*, No. 5-6, Sibiu 1936, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> As the Monophysites whowere satisfied by the Henoticon of Emperor Zeno (484) *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 182.

<sup>4</sup> ὁμολογοῦντες τὸν Θεὸν λόγον, ἓνα τῆς τριάδος, σεσαρχῶθαι cf. E. Schwartz: *Acta conciliorum oecum. IV*, II Strasbourg 1914. Preface p. 7 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Cyrillus Skythopolis, *Vita Sabae*, chap. 32 and 38, in *Cotelerius Ecclesiae graecae monumenta*, vol. III. Paris 1677-86, p. 264 and 278, and L. Duchesne: *Histoire ancienne de l'Eglise*, tome III; ed. Paris 1929, p. 509 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 183.

<sup>6</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, Introductory Study at *Scrieri ale „Călugărilor sciți” daco-români din secolul al VI-lea*, with a translation by Nicolae Petrescu, in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, No. 3-4, Craiova 1985, p. 200.

<sup>7</sup> This was admitted by some contemporaries such as Ephrem of Amida, the Chalcedonian successor of Peter Piuar (Fullo) on the seat of Antioch (526-544). In a letter addressed to Zenobius of Emesa and analyzed by Photios, he shows that "the Eastern were addressing this hymn to our Lord Jesus Christ, while the Byzantines and the Westerners linked

the anthem was interpreted in the trinitarian sense, and, so, the use of the variation involving interpolation was dangerous. The Chalcedonian opposition would have been grounded if it were restricted to objections directed against that fact. However, in some Chalcedonian texts are found oppositions to the many forms of Theopashism, frequent in the anti-Cyrrillian circles of Antioch in the period before and after the Synod of Ephesus<sup>8</sup>.

The group of the Scythian monks was quite large, some more important detaching among them: Joannes Maxentius, Leontius, John Maurice, Peter the Deacon, John and Achilles<sup>9</sup>. By the Scythian formula it was stated, against the Nestorians, that no man suffered for us, nor the whole Holy Trinity, that is, the Divine Being, but one of His Persons, because He assumed a body. The foundation of this statement is taken from *I Peter 4:1*: "*Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for He that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*" but also from other Fathers who have long meditated on the expression. Among them is St. Athanasius the Great, who stated that "*the infirmities are attributed to the Word for the sake of the body*", that is "*when He says He was hungry, He was thirsty, He was tired, He did not know, He fell asleep, that He wept, prayed, ran away and asked to be protected from all passions and simple things of the body, let it be understood... that Christ was hungry, thirsty for us with His body; that He said He did not know and was slapped and tired for us with His body; ... that He was afraid and hid with His body..., that He was hit and struck with His body*" (*The Third Word against the Arians*, chap. 33)<sup>10</sup>. Another patristic text used by the Scythian monks to support their Christological formula is "*Tome for the Armenians*"<sup>11</sup>, of St.

---

the Doxology to the One-Being Trinity" (Library, 228, PG, 103, col. 957 bc) *apud* John Meyendorff, *Hristos în gândirea creștină răsăriteană*, translated from English by Fr. Prof. Nicolai Buga, Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest 1997, p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> John Meyendorff, *Hristos în gândirea creștină răsăriteană*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>9</sup> Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 183.

<sup>10</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 201.

<sup>11</sup> The reason the Holy Father wrote this work was the request of the Armenians to receive clarification on "*the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia*". Its destination is therefore very clear: "*To the Bishops, Priests and Monks from the Holy Orthodox Church of Armenia*". He explains here the Christological issue of the two natures united in the only hypostasis of God the Word. Through this clear distinction between nature and person, Saint Proclus anticipated the Christology of the Council of Chalcedon. Given the particular importance of this document, modern theologians have affirmed that St. Procu's Tome represents "*the cornerstone of the Orthodoxy of the Armenian Church*" (Schwartz, ACO, IV, 2, pp. 187-195; Nicholas Constas, *Proclus of Constantinople and the cult of the Virgin in the Late Antiquity*, Homilies 1-5, text and translation by Nicholas Constas, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2003, pp. 105-112) *apud*

Proclus of Constantinople (†448). The text is an apologetic to the Incarnation of the Son of God against the Nestorian heresy. In order to remove the confusion around the hypostatic value of the two natures in the Incarnation, Saint Proclus asks rhetorically: "*The one who was crucified is one of the Trinity or someone else outside the Trinity? If He is one and the same, the puzzlement is settled. But if he is someone else, outside the Trinity, then the Lord of glory is the fourth and stranger to the glory of the seraphim*". The addition elucidates also the Monophysite wandering: "*But if we were to say that He was crucified in divinity, we would introduce suffering into the Trinity. But if we say that the Logos has taken the passions in His body, with this we confess that the one who has suffered is one of the Trinity, for the nature of the Trinity has remained without suffering... So what was incarnated has been crucified. But if it was crucified what was incarnated, then the Father and the Holy Spirit are not crucified; so, One of the Trinity was crucified*"<sup>12</sup>. The meaning of this formula, picked up and used by the Dobrogean monks, is fully explained in the doctrine of "*communicatio idiomatum = communication of attributes*". Metropolitan Irineu Popa thus says that by this expression we must understand that "*the Son of God, making himself Son of man, because of this union, God passed into Christ and Christ into God, and what suffered Christ, God also suffered. In this case, the very reason of the Resurrection has its fulfillment in the act of the Savior's death on the cross. Then God, being united to man, did not permit any interval between man and Himself, that is to say that another is the Son of Man and another one the Son of God*"<sup>13</sup>.

Starting from Proclus' statement but also from others he used, from the statements of St. Cyril and of Blessed Augustine, Joannes Maxentius draws up a "*Book on Faith*" (*Libellus fidei*), which seeks to analyze the formula sustained with so much pathos by the Scythian monks: "*One in the Holy Trinity suffered in the flesh*". In his explanations he shows that this "*One*" is Christos, The Son of God Incarnate, and not another Person of the Trinity, and that He was born of the Virgin Mary: "*The Virgin Mary gave birth to Christ, the One in the Trinity, Who suffered for us in the flesh, and so she did not bear the Trinity*". From her no Trinity was born. "*But if God was born of her, where is He if not of the Trinity? For, apart from the Trinity,*

---

Ioniță Apostolache, *Teologi daco-romani de seamă în cetatea eternă: lucrare mărturisitoare a Sfinților Ioan Casian, Dionisie Exiguul și Ioan Maxențiu (Dacian-Roman Theologians in the Eternal City: the Witnessing Work of Saints John Cassian, Dionysius Exiguus and Joannes Maxentius)*, Publishing House of the Metropolitan of Oltenia, Craiova 2018, p. 76.

<sup>12</sup> Proclus, *De fide*, III, to Joannes Maxentius, *Libellus fidei*, IV, 2; X, 17, 18, 19, Schwartz, p. 61 *apud* Ioniță Apostolache, *Teologi daco-romani de seamă în cetatea eternă...*, p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> †HE Prof. PhD. Irineu Ion Popa, *Iisus Hristos Este Același...*, pp. 475-476.

believers do not know another God"<sup>14</sup>. By disapproving of the idea that of the Virgin was born the Trinity, it was disapproved the Monophysite formula of Peter Gnafevs. The Scythian formula was not a new one, but it had received a new usage for the needs of that time. It protected the definition in Chalcedon not only of Nestorian interpretation but also of new Monophysite interpretations. The formula supported, on the one hand, against the Monophysites the distinction of Persons in God, on the other, the unity of the divine and human nature in the one Person of the Word, against Nestorianism. Therefore, at the end of his assertion, Joannes Maxentius condemned not only Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius, but also Eutyches, Dioscorus, Peter Gnafevs and Acachie.<sup>15</sup>

From the above it appears that the theological problems related to Chalcedonian and Monophysite Christology also concerned the monks of Scythia Minor. During the time of Emperor Anastasius I of Antioch there was religious unrest in this province, which is why the Emperor wants to convene a council at Heraclea, inviting Pope Hormisdas<sup>16</sup>, synod that had been promised<sup>17</sup> also under the pressure of General Vitalian of Scythia. The Synod was not held any longer because the Emperor was no longer afraid of the danger that the General Vitalian's rebellion might have represented, being defeated in a battle. Vitalian actually supported the faith of his compatriots who defended the Orthodox faith established during the Ecumenical Councils contrary to the philosophical religious policy of Emperor Anastasius I of Antioch<sup>18</sup>. His revolt began in 513 and was under the motto of the defense of Orthodoxy, although the objectives were also those of defending the economic and political interests of the Balkan and Danubian Romanized region and the desire of the rebellious to stand on the imperial throne. Constantinople is attacked three times and, although defeated in 515, the rebels remain fearful in the Balkans even to the end of Atanasius' rule. General Vitalian is promoted as supreme commander of the palatine army under Justin I, but he will die in 520 on the command of the future Emperor Justinian I<sup>19</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> At Maxentius, *De Christo professio*; PG 86, I, col. 83 *apud* Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 201.

<sup>15</sup> "This book", on which it is written in the Epistles concerning these monks as *Libellus fidei*, is given in P.G. 86, I, col. 75-84, under the title: *Epistola ad legatos sedis apostolicae*, of which *De Christo professio* is also part *apud* Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 202.

<sup>16</sup> J. Migne PL tom. 63 col. 373 C. D. *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 186.

<sup>17</sup> L. Duchesne, *L'Eglise au VI-e siècle*, Paris 1925, pp. 37-39 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 186.

<sup>18</sup> Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 186.

<sup>19</sup> Vasile V. Muntean, *Bizantinologie*, Volume I, Învieria Publishing, Timișoara, 1999, p. 82.

*Scythian Monks and their contribution to the clarification of the fourth century  
theology*

Due to their addition - "One in the Holy Trinity suffered in the flesh" - the Scythian monks enter into conflict with their bishop, Paternus of Tomis<sup>20</sup>, who also was in conflict with Vitalian. By the Emperor's intervention, their reconciliation takes place at a public meeting, the hierarch remaining in good ties with both Vitalian and the imperial court.

A Roman delegation arrives in Constantinople on March 25, 519 (in response to Emperor Justin's invitation to Pope Hormisdas<sup>21</sup>), having Dioscor deacon as leader, to discuss the issue of removing the Acacian Schism<sup>22</sup> and to consider the election of a hierarch on the vacant seat of Antioch<sup>23</sup>. Vitalian wanted the Scythian monks to defend their cause in front of Rome's delegates, who leaned more towards a Nestorian interpretation of Chalcedon. They supported their point of view both verbally and in writing through a text written by Joannes Maxentius and gave it to both Patriarch John and the Roman delegates<sup>24</sup>. However, the Roman delegates are against the Scythian monks, considering that they increased the disturbances and uncertainties that had already existed in Constantinople and prevented the reconciliation of the two East and

---

<sup>20</sup> Chr. Fr. W. Walch, *Entwurf einer vollständigen Histoire der Kezereyen, Spaltungen und Religionsstreitigkeiten, bis auf die Zeiten der Reformation* vol. VI, p. 299. După Knecht, *Die Religionspolitik Kaisers Justinians I*, Würzburg 1896, p. 75, we can not know whether the theological formula was the cause of the argument *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 187.

<sup>21</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 203.

<sup>22</sup> The Acacian Schism was provoked in 484, when Emperor Zeno published the Henoticon, by which the authority of the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon was impinged upon, in order to attract the Monophysites. Acacius, the Patriarch of Constantinople approves, after much hesitation, this imperial act, but the Roman bishop will not break the ties with the Orient. This was called the Acacian Schism and lasted until 519, when it was removed by the understanding between Pope Hormisdas, Justin I and Justinian *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 188.

<sup>23</sup> In Antioch, Severus had been Patriarch, a Monophysite installed and supported by Emperor Anastasius. Along with Justin I coming and his reaction, Severus was removed as a heretic, and then an Orthodox patriarch had to be elected *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 188.

<sup>24</sup> This is what the Roman deacon Dioscorus says in the Epistle to Pope Hormisdas on June 22, 519 (see *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, Berlin 1914, Schwartz Publishing. Their presentation is made by Fr. Glorie in *Prolegomena to Corpus christianorum, Latin Series*, p. 25) *apud* Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 203.

West poles already separated from the acacian schism, Dioscor describing them as the devil's messengers from Scythia Minor to Constantinople<sup>25</sup>.

Getting out of the Monophysite acacian schism, the Byzantines are quite reticent in admitting another formula that can create discomfort to Roman messengers, they were basically afraid that the formula could lead to a new conflict between the two churches. General Vitalian did not receive this refusal well and intervened beside the Patriarch and Deacon Victor, who at the meeting with the Scythians proved to be unfavorable. The two avoided seeing the monks, and the deacon Victor never met with papal delegates<sup>26</sup>. The Patriarch thus avoided an answer so as not to go back into disagreement with Rome.

Certainly the newly formulated formula raised talks and hesitations, being susceptible of Monophysite influences, or at least to the theopashism, but the Scythians were not the main guilty of the tense situation in Constantinople, a situation that existed before their arrival. The Scythian Monks do not add to the existing confession but rather seek to clarify what they have established, following the example of the Holy Fathers. It is said that: One in the Holy Trinity suffered in the flesh, because the Word of God, One in the Holy Trinity, was incarnate in the womb of the Holy Virgin Mary, who, worthily, is Theotokos. Just in this situation of incarnate, One in the Holy Trinity could suffer and not in His report with the other Persons of the Holy Trinity. This was their confession to the accusation of being monophysites or theopashists<sup>27</sup>.

## I.2. Scythian Monks in Rome

As they are constantly attacked by Roman delegates, the Scythians go to Rome, their mission also having a diplomatic charge<sup>28</sup>. The delegation consisted of four members: Joannes, Leontius, Achilles and Maurice<sup>29</sup>. Apparently they arrived at the

---

<sup>25</sup> "... quorum inquietudo non parvas moras generavit unitati ecclesiarum" - Thiel, *Epistolae Romanorum pontificum*, Braunsbergae 1867, ep. 76, 3 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 188.

<sup>26</sup> Fr. Glorie, *Proleg.*, p. 25 *apud* Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 203.

<sup>27</sup> In their letter, the papal delegates even state that the formula is Euthician and *sufficere debet Ecclesiae, quod per sexaginta annos ab Eutyches usque modo sustinuit*. Thiel, *op. cit.* ep. 76 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 190.

<sup>28</sup> Ioniță Apostolache, *Teologi daco-romani de seamă în cetatea eternă... (Daco-Roman Theologians in the Eternal City...)*, p. 77.

<sup>29</sup> According to Justinian, the letter to Hormisdas on June 29, 519, Thiel, *op. cit.*, ep. 78. But in the letter of the Scythian monks to the Africans in PL tom. 65, col. 442 Achilles and Mauritius are not mentioned, but Peter and Joannes are mentioned. We guess that Justinian did

end of July or early August 519. They were accompanied by Pauline, the Papal Defender in Constantinople (similar to an ambassador) and had a recommendation from Vitalian and General Justinian, nephew of Justin, who did not dare "*to openly break with Vitalian*", as Dioscorus says<sup>30</sup>. But soon Justinian sends another letter to the pope on June 29, 519, through which Dioscorus also writes. He asks the Pope to reprimand the Scythians and send them back. At first, Justinian seeks to support his uncle in reconciliation with Rome and then to intervene and ask for their cause. Until the receipt of Justinian's second letter, the Pope showed an openness to the Scythians, but then changed his attitude and postponed the decision on this situation. In fact, Justinian also intervenes in other letters to the pope and asks for his opinion on the topic so discussed, but on October 9, 520, he becomes definitive for the cause, asking the Pope for a clear answer: "*For us it seems that the Son of the living God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the One born of the Virgin Mary, Whom the forefather of the Apostles preaches that «suffered in the flesh», it's right to be believed as «One of the Trinity», because He rules with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and that His person is glorified «in the Trinity» and «from the Trinity». We do not think this is unbelievable*"<sup>31</sup>. This letter is sent through papal delegates who arrive in Rome on October 12, 520. It seems that the papal delegates would have been gained on the cause of Justinian, but Dioscorus continued to be contrary to the formula.<sup>32</sup>

Pope Hormisdas, being notified of the action of the Scythians, postpones their receipt for the analysis of their formula, also fearing the reaction of his delegates claiming that nothing should be added to the decisions of the ecumenical councils and to the Pope Leon's epistle. At the same time, the Pope was also afraid of a negative reaction to the Scythians in order not to compromise himself in Byzantium, where the Scythians already gained strong strengths<sup>33</sup>. From the pope's letters to Justin I, it is understood that he was not against the Scythians formula, which was not unorthodox, but against the fact that it was not among the past dogmatic decisions issued by the Church<sup>34</sup>.

---

not know exactly the name and the number of the Scythian delegates in Rome *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 191.

<sup>30</sup> At Fr. Glorie, *Proleg.*, p. 28 *apud* Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 204.

<sup>31</sup> See the contents of these letters at Fr. Glorie, *Proleg. cit. apud* Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 205.

<sup>32</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Knecht, *op. cit.*, p. 84 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 192.

<sup>34</sup> Nestor Vornicescu, Metropolitan of Oltenia, *Primele scrieri patristice în literatura noastră. Sec. IV-XVI*, Publishing House of the Metropolitan of Oltenia, Craiova 1984, p. 77.



Finally, the Pope addresses the Emperor and the Patriarch on March 25, 521<sup>35</sup> saying that their formula seems to attribute personal properties to the second hypostasis of the Holy Trinity, that is the Son, the very essence of the Father, which would be theopashism. Moreover, there was nothing to be added to Chalcedon's decisions, nor to Pope Leon's Epistle. This was the position of the papal delegates in Constantinople, whom the Pope followed.

The expectance of the Scythians in Rome was not a pleasant one. The pope refused to give them an answer<sup>36</sup> claiming that he was awaiting the arrival of his messengers from Constantinople, but at the same time did not let them leave Rome, being held in a quasi-prison<sup>37</sup>. The people sympathized with them and found them quite innocent<sup>38</sup>, as well as the influential people from the Roman world.

The return of Dioscorus in Rome, who left to Constantinople, seems to somehow complicate the thoughts of Pope Hormisdas. Dioscorus persuades the Pope to drive the Scythians out of Rome<sup>39</sup>, which eventually happens, to the great disappointment of the people. The Scythian monks were banished from Rome, although they had gone through so many trials to come to the Pope and analyze their teachings and although they had spent so long to receive a response that had emerged to be contrary to all expectations, and they were forced to return "*vacuos et sine ullo effectu*"<sup>40</sup>.

---

<sup>35</sup> Thiel *op. cit.*, ep. 136 and 141 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 193.

<sup>36</sup> Thiel *op. cit.*, ep. 112, 116, 123, 98 etc *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 193.

<sup>37</sup> See Justinian's correspondence with Pope Hormisdas, as well as *Responsi* of Maxentius, PG 86<sup>1</sup> col. 103 D *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 193.

<sup>38</sup> PG 86<sup>1</sup> col. 104 and 105 A.C. *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 194.

<sup>39</sup> Volens ei (lui Dioscor) praestare beneficium, ne in publico ab eisdem monachis argueretur haereticus missis detensoribus, cum ingenito violentiaeos ab urbe Roma subito exire compulit PG Col. 104 C *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 195.

<sup>40</sup> PG 86<sup>1</sup> col. 95. Baronius thinks that the Scythians fled, alone and in secret, from Rome, where they were detained by Pope Hormisdas, and on this occasion they also showed 12 anathematisms that include their teaching and which are still preserved. They are passed under the name of Joannes Maxentius and are called: *Contra nestorianos capitula* PG 86<sup>1</sup> col. 85-88. *Annales ecclesiastici Editio princeps Romae 1588* adanum 520 cap. 20. Baronius's statement that the Scythians fled alone from Rome seems more a late attempt to remove the guilt of a Roman pope. The monks had no interest in fleeing before they were given an answer and satisfaction in their matter. Therefore, Joannes Maxentius' testimony can be maintained as real, and they are justified also by the fact that Pope Hormisdas, seeing that the Scythian monks are of interest and attract the people and even its leaders, was afraid of disturbances and complications that would have been unfavorable to him, so he runs to an act of authority. Moreover, from all the documents we have seen in this matter, it is clear that the presence of the Scythian monks in Rome troubled the pope. See especially Hormisdas' letter to Possessor. As far as the anathematisms that Baronius speaks of, we have absolutely no indication that they would have

Father Staniloae issues another theory, that the Pope had banished the Scythians from Rome in August 520, after having held them for 14 months without giving them any answer; actually the pope drove them away because he wanted to avoid a meeting of the delegates with them, as it could have produced tension on the Pope, forcing him into accepting the formula.<sup>41</sup>

The Scythian monks also turned to the representatives of the African Church, hoping that they would support them. Several Africans, including Bishop Fulgentiu of Ruspe and deacon Fulgentiu Ferrandus of Carthage, were exiled to Sardinia by King Trasamund of the Vandals. Being close to them, the Scythians contacted them and informed them of their teaching<sup>42</sup>. The Holy Epistle is based on the work of Saint Cyril of Alexandria, namely Anathematism XII, which is textually mentioned, and Anathematism III, concerning the division of substances after the union of divine and human natures in the person of the Savior. This letter, well-grounded, would bring African consent to their formula. Fulgentiu of Ruspe responds to the letter, claiming that Christ is one of the Trinity, to Whom, by incarnation, the human part was added, which suffered<sup>43</sup>. This did not mean to use the suffering in the Holy Trinity, as those who opposed the Scythians claimed.<sup>44</sup>

A fierce fighter against the teachings of the Scythians is Bishop Possessor. He was in Constantinople, where he was exiled, and he corresponded with Pope Hormisdas<sup>45</sup>. Probably following the diminishing of their credibility at Constantinople, where they could have related what happened in Rome, Pope wrote on August 13, 520, immediately after their banishment, a letter to Bishop Possessor condemning the craze created by the Scythians among the inhabitants of Rome<sup>46</sup>. Possessor was a

---

been displayed by the Scythians when they were expelled from Rome. They may have composed them beforehand, as a defense weapon, and now inveterated by the situation to show them *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 196.

<sup>41</sup> This is what Maxentius says in Answers to the pope's letter addressed on August 13, 520, to the African bishop Possessor African bishop who was at that time at Constantinople *apud* Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 205.

<sup>42</sup> The letter was entitled: "*Dominis Sanctissimis et cum omni veneration nominandis, Datiano, Fortunato, Albano, Orontio, Boethia, Fulgentio, Januario et caeteris episcopis et in Christi confessione decorates exigui Petrus diaconus, Ioannes et caeteri fratres in causa fidei Roman directi*" Ep. XVI, at Fulgentiu of Ruspe, *Migne*, PL LXV, 442-451 *apud* Nestor Vornicescu, Metropolitan of Oltenia, *Primele scrieri patristice în literatura noastră...*, p. 76.

<sup>43</sup> *Migne*, PL LXV, Ep. 17, 18-21 *apud* Nestor Vornicescu, Metropolitan of Oltenia, *Primele scrieri patristice în literatura noastră...*, p. 77.

<sup>44</sup> Nestor Vornicescu, Metropolitan of Oltenia, *Primele scrieri patristice în literatura noastră...*, pp. 74-77.

<sup>45</sup> Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 198.

<sup>46</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, pp. 205-206.

powerful anti-Monophysite fighter who started the offensive with arguments from Faust de Riez's work, semipelagian and their opponent. This gives Possessor a negative resonance among the Scythians. Joannes Maxentius<sup>47</sup> claimed that his writings were heretical and that despite the fact that he relied on the works of Hilary of Poitiers, Prosper of Aquitaine and Blessed Augustine, he wrote altogether other than these, and did not preach that Christ the Son of God, crucified for the world, is One of the Holy Trinity<sup>48</sup>.

Joannes Maxentius elicits an answer to the pope's epistle in which the main theme is the fight against Nestorianism, as the papal delegates inclined openly towards this when in Constantinople, or the pope more secretly in Rome: "*In this city none of those who are faithful really doubts as Possessor, to whom and about whom he writes, does not testify that Christ, the Son of the living God, is One of the undivided Trinity, even if the opponents of those who faithfully profess this accuse them, on the basis of the Epistle, of being unfaithful and perfidious. That is why he quotes this epistle for this purpose, everywhere, shamelessly, on the ground of their denial that Christ, the Son of God, is One of the Holy and undivided Trinity, and thus the Nestorian wickedness can be preached by its partisans freely*"<sup>49</sup>. The conclusion is that not the Scythian monks who profess Christ are heretics, but those who accuse them with all kinds of accusations. Joannes Maxentius issues the idea that the pope would not be the author of the epistle, saying that it is impossible for the bishop of Rome to contradict this confession of faith. For how would he have permitted in this case to communicate with those Scythian monks who profess that Christ, the Son of God, is One of the Trinity (Christum filium Dei unum ex Trinitate confitere) not only by speech, but also in writing, held in Rome for 14 months, if, as the heretics say, the pope had had considered this confession contrary to universal belief. Joannes Maxentius suspected that the pope might have written the epistle deceived by Dioscorus: "*In any case, whether this letter is written by him or by anyone else, no doubt that its author is heretical, once he considers that testifying Christ, the Son of God, the One of the Trinity, is a combination of words meant to harm those who hear it*"<sup>50</sup>.

### **I.3. Emperor Justinian and the Scythian Monks**

If Emperor Anastasius I wanted to impose the Henoticon of his predecessor, to cancel the decisions of Chalcedon and to bring Rome to order through his imperial authority, his successor, Emperor Justinian (527-565), followed a much more

---

<sup>47</sup> Ad. ep. Hormisdæ responsio PG 86<sup>1</sup> col. 106 c apud Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 198.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem* col. 106 D and col. 107 apud Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 198.

<sup>49</sup> Migne, PG 86, I, col. 96 apud D. Stăniloae, *Scieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 207.

<sup>50</sup> Migne, PG 86, I, col. 100 apud D. Stăniloae, *Scieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 208.

Orthodox path. He relied heavily in his politics on *the principle of harmony between the State and the Church*. He strongly believed that these two pillars of society must never be in contradiction, "*The church being the soul, and the State, the body*"<sup>51</sup>.

Justinian has plays an essential role in the history of the Scythian monks<sup>52</sup>. Wishing religious peace in the empire, he found it appropriate that it could be brought in through these monks, so that the Nestorian and Monophysit groups can reach an agreement, not removing the theology of St. Cyril. According to the information, the attitude of the Emperor was initially not very friendly to them. He believed that they would try to cause turbulence within the Church, since their formula was not found in the Church's decisions until then, but soon the situation would take a radical turn and the Scythians would become imperial-protected. Justinian addresses Pope Hormisdas in July 519<sup>53</sup> and defends the monks. He tells him that Vitalian also addressed him through a certain Paulian. This was to be expected because Vitalian could not forget his compatriots. We can assume that his influence at the Imperial Court was so great that he caused the Emperor to reorient. Between the Pope and the Emperor there is a correspondence on the edge of the so lit topic of those times. Thus, in a letter dated September 9, 520<sup>54</sup> we find Justinian fully attracted to the Scythian teaching. From now on, the emperor will support by edict the assumed confession, hoping to thereby attract the Severians<sup>55</sup>.

From 521 to 527, we have no news of the Scythian monks and their confession<sup>56</sup>, for in March 521 the Pope had sent a letter to Justinian claiming that

---

<sup>51</sup> "There are two great gifts that God, in His love of men, gives us from above: priesthood and royal dignity. The former serves the divine, while the latter manages and guides the human ones: yet both flow from the same source and adorn the lives of men... So, if the priesthood is totally faultless and obeyed by God, and if the emperors rule the State impartially and righteously... there will be public harmony (*συνφωνία της αyaθης*) and its fruits shall be poured out upon all the flesh... if the commandments of the Church, which the righteous and the praiseworthy Apostles, watchers and ministers of the Word of God, and the Holy Fathers confessed and preserved for us, are respected" (Justinian, Novela VI) *apud* Ioniță Apostolache, *Teologi daco-romani de seamă în cetatea eternă...*, p. 74.

<sup>52</sup> See in this regard A. Jugie art. *Monofisism in Dictionnaire de Theologie catholique*, par. Vacant, Mangenot et Amann *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 199.

<sup>53</sup> Thiel, *op. cit.* ep. 89 and PL tome 63 and col. 476 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 200.

<sup>54</sup> "... majestas ejus personam in Trinitate et ex Trinitate non infideliter credimus (dicere) ep. 139 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 201.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Victor Tonnensis, *Chronicon*, PL tome 68, ad an. 529. Also G. Krüger, art. *Teopaschiten*, in *Realenciklopedie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 19 Band, Leipzig 1907, col. 662 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 202.

<sup>56</sup> Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 202.

there should be no addition to the Christological definitions of the previous Councils<sup>57</sup>. This is explained by the fact that after Pope Hormisdas' answer in March 521, a negative answer for the Scythians, the matter seemed to be elucidated for the West.

When he became king in 527, Justinian issued an edict<sup>58</sup> which resembled a proclamation to the people, and in which the doctrine of the Scythian monks was remembered. On March 15, 533, the formula is also recalled by an edict and becomes binding for those who profess the Orthodox faith. In this document the Scythian formula is designed in such a way that it does not contradict the Trinitarian and the Christological teachings<sup>59</sup>. The contents of the decree were similar to the one in 527 (*Profesio Fidei*). There is a strong opposition from the monks at the Monastery of the "Watchers" from Constantinople. The Emperor approved another decree on March 26<sup>60</sup>, addressed to Patriarch Epiphanius. The same decree was sent to Pope John II. This explained and completed the one before<sup>61</sup>. He was received by Patriarch Epiphanius, by the bishops present in Constantinople (532), as well as by Pope John II (March 25, 534), because he was not in contradiction with the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon<sup>62</sup>.

In a letter to Justinian confirming this decree, Pope John congratulated the emperor, using words more than delightful to Justinian's orthodoxy and to his religious policy with which he was perfectly in agreement. Among other things, the Pope wrote: *"Nothing is spreading more glorious light than the righteous faith of a ruler; nothing is more durable than true faith... For this, O, Most Glorious Lord, all prayers will beg the divine power for the liveliness of your fierce prayers to the true creed, for the breaking of your heart and for your unfailingness in the right faith. For we believe it is of great use to the holy churches... The king's soul is in the hand of God, and He directs him according to His will (Proverbs 21:1). This is the foundation of your kingdom and the firmness of your reign. For the peace of the Church and the unity of faith, He raises his leader to a high place and sustains him in joy and peace. The power of God will not forsake the one who defends the Church from all evil and staining dissolution, for it is written: «A king that sits in the throne of judgment*

---

<sup>57</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 207.

<sup>58</sup> Codex I. 1, 5. Paul Krüger Edition, Berlin 1877 *apud* Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, p. 202.

<sup>59</sup> Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, pp. 202-204.

<sup>60</sup> *Codex Justinianus*, I. 1.7, Krüger, G. "Justinian I", *Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, IX, 650-660, pp. 8-10 *apud* Asterios Geronterios, *Justinian cel Mare, Sfânt și Împărat*, translated from English by Ovidiu Ioan, Sophia Publishing, Bucharest 2004, p. 78.

<sup>61</sup> *Codex Justinianus*, I. 1.7, Krüger, p. 8 *apud* Asterios Geronterios, *Justinian cel Mare, Sfânt și Împărat*, p. 79.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*

*Scythian Monks and their contribution to the clarification of the fourth century  
theology*

*scatters away all evil with his eyes». (Proverbs, 20:8) I have heard that you have addressed to all believers an edict in which your religious zeal urges you to support the apostolic teaching against heretical doctrines, at the instigation of the brethren and those with our new bishops. Since your deed is according to the apostolic teaching, we grant it to our authority".<sup>63</sup>*

Emperor Justinian would enforce the theological formula fought by Pope Hormisdas, even to his descendants, John II and Agapetus, this proving his influence in all social levels, as well as his prestige and zeal in ecclesiastical matters, a fact that was also acknowledged by the Roman popes.<sup>64</sup>

Confirmation and acceptance by the Orthodox of the Theopashite formula of Justinian's decree did not alter the religious situation much, especially in Egypt. The events that took place put Justinian in a difficult situation. His efforts to reconcile the Orthodox with the moderate Monophysites using the formula of the Scythian monks did not lead to any result. The Theopashite decree from 533, which had been well received by Rome and Constantinople and by a large number of Orthodox hierarchs, and in which the Emperor had put his great hopes for the success of his unification policy, did not have the desired outcome. Neither his retention and tolerance shown to the monophysites, nor the adoption of the Theopashite decree, through which a dogmatic interpretation, common to the two sides, of the Fourth Ecumenical Synod was obtained, failed to bring the Monophysites back to the Church.

However, Justinian did not renounce his unifying religious policy and his theological endeavors to regain the Monophysites to the Orthodox Church. He tried again to find new foundations that the Orthodox and the Monophysites could support in order to solve the differences between them, especially with regard to the dogmatic expressions of Chalcedon.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, the formula was to obtain final approval through the 5th Ecumenical Synod of 553 in Constantinople.<sup>66</sup>

#### **I.4. Monk Joannes Maxentius**

Joannes Maxentius (born somewhere in Dobrogea in the middle of the 5th century, died at an unknown date in the middle of the 6th century, most probably also

---

<sup>63</sup> Translation of F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Backgrounds*. Dumbarton Oaks Studies, IX, Washington, Trustees for Harvard Univ., 1966. II, p. 820. For the original text see Migne, PL, 66, col. 17; *Codex Justinianus*, I. 1.8, Kruger, p. 10 *apud* Asterios Gerontorios, *Justinian cel Mare, Sfânt și Împărat*, p. 79.

<sup>64</sup> Vasile Sibiescu, *Împăratul Iustinian I și ereziile*, Bucharest, 1938, p. 69.

<sup>65</sup> Asterios Gerontorios, *Justinian cel Mare, Sfânt și Împărat*, pp. 79-82

<sup>66</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 209.

in Dobrogea) was a remarkable church and polemist writer, also having an important role in the group of Daco-Roman intellectuals known in history under the name of the Scythian monks. Joannes Maxentius, sometimes signing as Maxentius Exiguus (Maxentius the little, in the sense of *the Humble*) was trained as a theologian in the monastic and scholastic environments between the Danube and the sea.<sup>67</sup>

Research calls into question the existence of two names for this monk: Joannes Maxentius (research based on the Migne Collection<sup>68</sup>) and Maxentius (like that). At the same time, it is also mentioned that Maxentius does not appear among the monks who went to Rome, hence that he would have remained in Constantinople<sup>69</sup>. The idea is reinforced by voices stating that Maxentius would have remained in Byzantium to continue to plead with the officials and Justinian for the formula: "*One in the Holy Trinity suffered in the flesh*". This variant could also be taken into account, for if he had remained in Constantinople he certainly would have intervened next to Justinian, this resulting perhaps in the radical change in the attitude of the emperor for the so controversial formula<sup>70</sup>. However, it is also necessary to consider the fact that the Most Venerable Joannes Maxentius was the chief spokesman for the Scythian monks, which is why he was considered *primus inter pares*. At least for this reason we could admit that he was in Rome<sup>71</sup>.

Through Maxentius' artistic experience, the Scythian monks express their views, first in Constantinople, through a number of writings defending the judgment of Chalcedon on the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ, and attacking the doctrines of the Nestorians. The works known today are: *About Faith to the Pope's Delegates to Constantinople*, *Chapters against Nestorians and Pelagians*, *A Very Short Confession of the Orthodox Faith*, *Very Brief Motivation on the Unification of the Word of God with His Own Body*, *Answer against the Acephali, who, after the union of the two natures, confess erroneously "one nature in Christ"* and *Dialogue against the Nestorians*<sup>72</sup>.

These writings with an impressive patristic content prove the clarity and richness of the thought of this monk coming from Scythia Minor: "*a monk who devours for the true faith of the Universal Church that he wants sheltered by Nestorian, Pelagian and*

---

<sup>67</sup> Mihail Diaconescu, *Istoria Literaturii Dacoromane*, Alcor Edimpex Publishing, Bucharest 1999, p. 574.

<sup>68</sup> PG 86, I, 75-164 *apud* Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 210.

<sup>69</sup> Fr. Glorie, *op. cit.*, p. 41 *apud* D. Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 210.

<sup>70</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 210.

<sup>71</sup> Mihail Diaconescu, *Istoria Literaturii Dacoromane...*, p. 575.

<sup>72</sup> These writings: *Epistola ad apostolicam legationem*, *Libellus fidei*, *Dialogi contra Nestorianos* and the others are published by J. P. Migne in PG LXXXVI, 73-158 and by Ed. Schwartz in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, IV, 2, 1914, pp. 3-62 *apud* Nestor Vornicescu, Metropolitan of Oltenia, *Primele scrieri patristice în literatura noastră...*, p. 75.

*other machinations... There are, among these works, short testimonies of faith of a rare concision and precision, reasoning and developments of a rare logical beauty and an unusual dialectic on the divine and human relationship, guided by the thought and in the atmosphere of purity".<sup>73</sup>*

Joannes Maxentius's theological, philosophical and anthropological subtlety and rigor, can be seen from the whole content of his works, but especially from the way he presents the nature-person relationship. He claims that nature is common to many people. The person is, however, a personalized personality. It contains the nature itself, which is always real and evident. But the person is, for a while, hidden in nature. This does not mean that the person does not exist. From the person, the organs, the flesh, and the blood of an individual, emerges the person, who for a while has been hidden and yet wholly, full, according to his own reason, in the matter from which a certain man develops. But the person transcends the elements of the being that subsists in it. The analysis of the relationship between nature and person leads Joannes Maxentius to affirm the difference but also the unity of the natures in the Savior Jesus Christ. The unity of the divine-human Person of the Savior, namely its dual consubstantiality with God and with man, demonstrates that His Subject is Itself the Hypostasis of the Word (Logos) of the eternal God. In the divine-human Person of our Savior Jesus Christ, the two natures are hypostatically united.<sup>74</sup>

We are giving a very short teaching of the Most Venerable Joannes Maxentius about the union of God's Word with His own body:

*"I. Son of God, Father's Word, One in the Trinity, consubstantial with the Father, begotten of Him before the ages, remaining God in His own Person, afterwards, lately, during the words of the invisible angel, and in the time of faith, shown by the Virgin, in these words, with His own strength of His power, making Himself Body, out of the members of the same Virgin, without the seed of man, remaining God in His own nature, made Himself Man, having a rational or understanding Body, and so when the fulness of the time was come, according to the law of human nature, came out of the virginal womb (cf. Psalms 18:5; Ioil 2:16).*

*2. For this reason, the union or unification in Christ is called, in all righteousness, natural, and not by association, because the Word has not united in the womb of the Virgin with a body, ready-made, or animated, fapt care poate să arate că este o persoană a oricărui om, but «Wisdom has built Her house» (Proverbs 9:1) of the viscera of the Virgin.*

---

<sup>73</sup> Ioan Coman, *Scriitori teologi în Schythia Minor*, in Volume *De la Dunăre la Mare - Mărturie Istorică și monumente de Artă Creștină*, Publishing House of the Archdiocese of Tomis and Lower Danube, Galați f.a., p. 73.

<sup>74</sup> Mihail Diaconescu, *Istoria Literaturii Dacoromane...*, pp. 576-577.



3. *Indeed, if the Word of God had been united in the virginal womb with a body formed or animated, this union or unification should have been called an association rather than a natural union; in this case, it would not be believed that the Person of the Word united with the nature of the Body, but that He has united with the person of any man. But those who say this are penetrated by Nestorius' wandering.*

4. *But the universal Church believes and confesses that the person of the Word has not joined the person of a man already formed, but He joined the nature of the Body (His), and, that is why, it teaches that a union was made, not through association or relationship, but natural".* (Translation after *Corpus Christianorum*, S. L., LXXXV A, Turnholti, 1978, pp. 39-40).<sup>75</sup>

The writings of Joannes Maxentius, the socio-historical environment in which they were elaborated, the conditions under which they were sustained, but especially their orthodox doctrinal unity shows the high stage of the literary, theological and philosophical level of the scholastic and monastic ambiance in Scythia Minor (Pontic Dacia), but also the important, perhaps even decisive, role in the internal and church policy of the Roman-Byzantine Empire in the 5th and 6th centuries.<sup>76</sup>

### **I. 5. The Triumph of the Scythians**

The dream of peace and religious union of Emperor Justinian appears to have been fulfilled, at least in the question raised by the Scythians, with the recognition of the formula that One of the Trinity suffered in the flesh and its confirmation by the West.

Confirmed by the Emperor to the whole empire, the teaching of the Scythian monks will finally defeat the 5th Ecumenical Council. The Trullan Synod of 692 would combat the Theopashite teachings, but this did not touch the Scythian expression, but only the addition of Peter Gnafevs to *Agios O Theos*, claiming that God suffered in its very divine essence.

In the Scythian formula it is stated that One in the Holy Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ, incarnate for our salvation suffered only in the flesh, and this suffering also affected His person, and this through the communication of the idiomelon. The Scythian monks have greatly influenced Justinian's conception regarding the closeness to the Monophysites through the theology of Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the preserving of the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon. This is a great quality of

---

<sup>75</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, Introductory Study at *Scrieri ale „Călugărilor sciți” daco-români din secolul al VI-lea (519-520)*, with a translation by Nicolae Petrescu, in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, No. 5-6, Craiova 1985, p. 394.

<sup>76</sup> Mihail Diaconescu, *Istoria Literaturii Dacoromane...*, p. 577.

*Scythian Monks and their contribution to the clarification of the fourth century  
theology*

these monks from the far Dobrogea, who have managed to bring their contribution to peace and church unity.<sup>77</sup>

Characteristic for the Scythian monks who were in the same spirit of faith and the same spiritual struggle with Leontius, is their Orthodox inclination, the Chalcedonian confession and the orientation towards the Roman Church, a position that seems to be based on the cultural-political element and even ethnicity, mirroring the consciousness of their Romanity, Latin-speaking Romans, and the opposition to the Asian concepts (Monophysites, Aryans, etc.). While Rome and Byzantium were misunderstood, during Anastasius' time, the Scythian monks and General Vitalius were in good relations with the Papacy<sup>78</sup>. Perhaps this middle ground in understanding Christ's saving iconony and the great mercy of God toward men has been relieved by the Dacian-Roman monks also by the middle ground between East and the West in which they have lived together with the entire Thracian and Daco-Roman population. Their language was Latin, but they kept close ties with Constantinople and the entire Christian Orient. They have played a compelling role between Eastern and Western Christianity. Perhaps this was a purpose to which the Daco-Romans were called, helped in their struggle to impose the balance by General Vitalian and Emperor Justinian, coming from the same Thracian-Roman space that filled the space between the Orient and the West.<sup>79</sup>

Formal recognition of the formula came with the introduction in 535 or 536 in the Holy Liturgy of the troparion or 2<sup>nd</sup> antiphon: "*Only Begotten...*"<sup>80</sup> In this song we address Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, Who has incarnated for our salvation from the Virgin Mary. But the words "*Being One from the Holy Trinity*" are introduced into it. To avoid the Nestorian support that humanity has added itself, it is also stated: "*And You have received to incarnate Yourself*". For the same reason the words "*of the Theotokos*" are added, which are not found in the Symbol of Faith (325 and 381). The fact that there are not two persons in Christ is emphasized by the expression "*glorified together with the Father and the Holy Spirit*". The Troparion is directed against Nestorianism and Monophysitism as it is stated that only "*One from the Holy Trinity*" was crucified, by the fact that he was incarnated as a man, so it is not the whole Trinity that was crucified.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, *Călugării Sciți*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>78</sup> Ioan I. Russu, *Elementele Traco-Getice în Imperiul Roman și în Byzantium (veacurile III-VII)*, Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, Bucharest 1976, p. 90.

<sup>79</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 244.

<sup>80</sup> V. Grumel, *L'auteur et la date de la composition du tropaire „O Monogenes”*, Echos d'Orient 22, 1933 *apud* Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, p. 209.

<sup>81</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, pp. 209-210.

The Scythian formula is a solid foundation also for the act of communion with the Eucharist body and blood of Jesus Christ. If the Son of God had united with a man and had not become Himself human, making human His own body and blood, the sharing of these would be the sharing of the body and blood of a man, and not of the body and blood of the Son of God made man. In this situation, we would not unite through them with the divine hypostasis, or the Son of God made man, and we could not become brothers of the Son of God, of a being with Him after mankind.

In fact, the misunderstanding of the Christology of the Scythian monks lay in the erroneous understanding of the passion of the Logos made man, the "*One in the Holy Trinity*", with the passion of the whole Trinity. Thus, in some circles, their theology was assimilated to the Eutychianist heresy, leading in part to the Patripassianite heresy<sup>82</sup>. Despite the fact that the 5th Ecumenical Council of Constantinople confirms the Orthodox value of this formula, the Catholic theology has long had certain reservations about it<sup>83</sup>.

The content of the formula "*One in the Holy Trinity suffered in the flesh*" can be summarized in:

6. One of the Trinity, taking our nature, relieved it from death and raised it into His eternal communion with the other Persons of the Holy Trinity. The people, with whom He made Himself One after humanity, being in communion with the immortal and resurrected hypostasis, regain immortality;

7. This One born of the Trinity, the Son of God, is also made man as the Son of God and the bearer of the Father's loving Spirit and through Him us also;

8. The hypostasis of the Son made man acquires through the humanity that he has made his own direct communication with us, communicating endlessly His riches to men;

9. The humanity that the Son of God took has the highest and eternal value, and by our attachment to Him, this value also projects itself upon our humanity;

10. Christ the Lord, acquiring as man our work on nature and His passion from the whole cosmos, as well as our work and passion in relation to men, has confirmed and perfected the position of man and a worker together with people in relation to the

---

<sup>82</sup> *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica*, Maroni Romano (ed), vol. LXXIV, Tipografia Emiliana, Venezia, p. MDCCCLV, p. 63 *apud* Ioniță Apostolache, *Teologi daco-romani de seamă în cetatea eternă...*, p. 82.

<sup>83</sup> In the seventeenth century, for example, the Western theologian Barnonnus stated that "*Joannes Maxentius and his companions, the monks of Scythia, were clearly perfidious Eutychians, and as such they were condemned by the Roman Church, and caused great disturbances in the universal Church, both in Constantinople and in Rome... They went so far as to claim themselves as supporters of the Council of Chalcedon in a cunning manner, but they dragged it with their heretical cunning*" (*Annales ecclesiastiques*, t. VII, chap. 26, 81-89, 97) *apud* Ioniță Apostolache, *Teologi daco-romani de seamă în cetatea eternă...*, pp. 82-83.

peers and the nature. So only through man the Son of God has gathered the universe in Himself and lives it with us.<sup>84</sup>

### **Conclusions**

The formula of the Scythian monks "*One in the Holy Trinity suffered in the flesh*" is based on the distinction between person and nature that they have done. The person is not just the actual existence of the being, but also the way it exists as a relationship. In God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit fulfill the inner relations of the divine being. But just as a human person can have relationships not only with the fellow beings with her, but also with those who are not of a being, the more God has this capacity, being the creator of all. This idea was given by the Dacian-Roman monks using the terms "*own*" or "*compound*" referring to the hypostasis of the Son of God made man.

This formula was admitted and acknowledged by Emperor Justinian in 533, being introduced in the Liturgy at Constantinople. The novelty in the cult had as a repercussion the so-called theophasite dispute, in which the akoimati monks<sup>85</sup> played an important role<sup>86</sup>.

The Scythian monks marked the faith in "*God's descent from heaven*", but claiming that God Himself became man, suffered and was crucified for us. They have so much marked the eternal value of man before God and salvation as the victory of death by the resurrection. God takes upon Him the passion of death for us, suffering as we suffer, but makes this passion a way of escaping our death. Christ came to us as close as He could, so that we can be in the greatest proximity to Him. He confirms this maximum closeness with us by accepting our humanity, receiving our own passion and death, but not to stand in them but to overcome them. That is why, through the Holy Eucharist we receive Him as hypostasis, but we receive Him in our humanity in which He was made available in our concrete human body, but transfigured by divinity. Through this, the Scythian monks have emphasized the very value and mystery of the human body.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, pp. 240-242.

<sup>85</sup> Akoimati (ἀκοιμητοί or those who do not sleep), who for the first time set up a monastery for those who do not sleep on the banks of the Euphrates in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. They were condemned with Nestorie *apud* Dimitrie G. Boroianu, *Istoria Bisericii creștine de la începuturile ei și până în zilele noastre (History of the Christian Church from Its Beginnings to Our Day)*, Edited and updated by Fr. Daniel Benga, Anastasia Foundation Publishing House, Bucharest 2007, p. 154.

<sup>86</sup> Dimitrie G. Boroianu, *Istoria Bisericii creștine de la începuturile ei și până în zilele noastre (History of the Christian Church from Its Beginnings to Our Day)*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>87</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scrieri ale Călugărilor sciți...*, pp. 242-244.